

Information Overload

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Welcome:

Ethics. Working in the fields of Information and Records (in all its varieties and forms) Management, we are in a unique position. We have the capability of learning a great deal about the organisations where we work, and the people we work with. We can learn about the trials, tribulations and many of the issues facing the organisation and the steps they are taking to counter the problems. And we have access to things few others will ever have the access or privilege to see. As a librarian I have been through some of the best libraries in the world, and have seen items such as the original drawings and notes made by Darwin. It is a sense of pride and honour to know that we are custodians of these unique pieces of work, ensuring their survival long after we have departed this planet we call home.

But what happens when some people use their position for personal gain? As always we hope you enjoy reading.

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- When you take your work home with you;
- What price history?
- When the new “owner” is another collecting institution;
- Corporate espionage
- A Thought to ponder.

When you take your work home with you:

Chances are going to be good that at some point during your working life you will take work home with you. For most of us it is probably just a case of too much work / not enough time during working hours or even pretending we have too much work and taking some home to perpetuate the myth. But now is not the time to go into the semantics about better time management. What generally happens though is the work we take home – be it in hard copy, emailed to a home account, or taken away from the office electronically, we do whatever we need to do and then take it back the following working day. Rarely would you deliberately take work home and leave it there, it just means you wouldn't be able to do your “work” at work, compounding a problem if you do have too much work and not enough hours to do it in.

However, let's say for the sake of argument that you had access to some “interesting” pieces of information, documents and / or artefacts. You know these items belong to the organisation you work for, or if you are very lucky they might belong to the country you live in (as in they have been given to a collecting institution) but you'd like to study them in more

detail, so you decide to take one or two home with you so you can do so without interruptions. Of course you take great care of the item(s), but because your analysis isn't complete, you decide to leave the item(s) at home. Other things cross your path and your personal stock pile of interesting items grows larger. You know you should take them back to work, but there are never enough hours in a day to do everything you need to do so you reason that – the items are safe enough where they are and it's not like you are stealing them or anything, because all you are doing is working on them from home.

Of course it could be argued that modern security screening would ensure that items couldn't be removed from the collecting institutions, and tagging would ensure that all items are traceable anyway. As a newly qualified librarian I worked in an academic library. We had the usual array of security measures in place and we all took our place in the processing department to ensure the individual items were tagged before heading down to the shelves, and into the hands and homes of many borrowers. In my 11 years at this library we only did one complete stock check. Given there were several million items in the collection, you can understand why, but the process was interesting. One of the things we found in the stacks were the security tags. These were removed from the books and left behind, and the books and journals could then be taken from the library without fear of the "permanent borrower" being caught. The other "normal" practice employed by the students was to remove individual pages rather than spending money photocopying them.

Selfish behaviour aside, the money the library could have spent on new items had to be divided into replacements, mending and re-processing (yes some items were given back). But there is another aspect to this behaviour that is far more selfish than taking a few books without having them checked out and returning them at the end of the year, and that is the worrying trend of stealing items for profit.

It has been estimated that the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library is unable to find or account for 80,000 items which had been acquired by the then President of the United States during his term in the white house. Inspector General Paul Brachfeld said that his office was investigating allegations that a former employee stole Reagan memorabilia but that the probe had been hampered by the facility's sloppy record-keeping.

It is not known at this stage where these items are, whether they have been taken for personal use (gifts to the president included everything from a knitted stars and stripes to a collection of belt buckles) or monetary gain, but one thing is for sure, the Reagan library is not the only large organisation to suffer at the hands of an employee. <http://www.culturalheritagelaw.org/news-issues/news-issues-in-cultural-heritage/reagan-library-cant-fully-account-for-80-000-artifacts/>

What price history?

Reports have surfaced in America of a janitor who worked for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania who removed 4 swords from the collection and then sold them to someone who had expressed an interest in military history. Making a mere \$8,000 from the transaction, the pieces were worth in excess of \$750,000 – given the rarity of the items taken, it could be argued the pieces were in effect "priceless". Thankfully an audit of the collection highlighted the missing items, and the FBI were called in to investigate. <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/arttheft/northamerica/us/penn/penn.htm>

Whilst support personnel (in this case a janitor) decided to use his position to access and remove the items for personal gain, a more worrying case has just come to light. A New York State Department of Education employee allegedly used his position to steal hundreds of historic documents and artefacts belonging to the State Library, selling some for personal

profit on eBay and traded others at collectors' shows. Daniel D. Lorello, 54, of Van Leuven Dr. in Rensselaer, held the position of Archives and Records Management Specialist 3 with the Office of Cultural Education in the Department of Education. He has been charged with third-degree grand larceny, fourth-degree criminal possession of stolen property and first-degree scheme to defraud.

"These irreplaceable documents are the property of all New Yorkers," said Attorney General Cuomo. "Public employees with access to records of New York State's vibrant history are trusted curators who must not abuse their power for personal gain. My office will prosecute any allegation that an individual has attempted to pawn off the state's property as their own." <http://www.357news.com/crime/albanyag29108.php>

Section 78 of the State Records Act of Western Australia 2000 states " A government organisation employee who, without lawful authority, transfers, or who offers to transfer, the possession of a government record to a person who is not entitled to possession of the record, commits an offence. " If found guilty, the penalty is A\$10,000.

At this point, we have only spoken about individuals who may decide to obtain, retain and sell items. There is another aspect to this debate we need to look at. What happens when the new "owner" is another collecting institution?

When the new "owner" is another collecting institution:

Travelling exhibitions are one of the many ways museums and galleries can share their "treasures" with the rest of the world. The recent Egyptian antiquities exhibition attracted thousands of visitors to the Art Gallery in Perth, allowing visitors to see and experience the items first hand, and certainly saved paying for a ticket to Paris. This exhibition brought thousands of people into Perth's cultural centre, bringing with it a chance to showcase the "borrowed" collection as well as the Gallery's own collection, and of course make some additional monies. But where did the Louvre obtain these items from in the first place?

Collecting institutions, interested individuals and private collectors the world over have obtained (purchased or have had donated) items that come from somewhere – usually another country. Yes, a statement of the blindingly obvious. The reason these items are in our personal, private and public collections in the first place is because of rarity of the piece(s) and / or name of the artist (be it painter, sculptor, writer, person of interest and so on). With rarity and a "name" to go with the piece usually comes a large price tag. And where there is money, there will be people out to take a slice for themselves, legally or illegally. For instance, it has been reported that items smuggled out of Turkey have been found in at least six countries: The US, England, Germany, France, Russia and Italy and attempts to recover the items are still on going. For example: Some of the **Troy potteries** and around 480 gold ornaments are known to be in Berlin, while other artefacts are held by Russia's Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

The Herakles Resting sculpture: The lower part of the Roman sculpture, which was smuggled to the US in 1980 during the Perge excavations, is on display at the Antalya Archeological Museum. The upper part of Herakles is partly owned by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and collectors Leon Levy and Shelby White. **The Kumluca artifacts** were looted from a church in Antalya's Kumluca district in 1963 and are now on exhibit at the Dumbarton Oaks Museum in Washington, D.C. Then there are 40 historical artefacts on display at the J. Paul Getty Museum are of Anatolian origin. And whilst the Italian Interpol recovered the Lydian inscription from an Italian named Galeotti on Nov. 14, 1997, it has not

been returned to Turkey and is still in Italy. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=125617>

Looting of sites has been going on for millennia, with perhaps the most notable being the Egyptian Pharaohs. Ethically speaking, if you know some of your collection belongs to another organisation and / or country, would you be willing to give it back? One museum – the [Southwest Museum](#) in [Los Angeles](#) CA, released a statement in 1937 that the museum would no longer purchase or accept collections from looted contexts. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology#Looting>.

Then there is also the debate between native cultures rights of respect for their burial sites and an academic need to study them. This has been addressed by the - [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#) (NAGPRA, 1990), to prevent human remains from being archived rather than re-buried. In Canada the [repatriation](#) of native [artifacts](#) to the original descendants occurred on June 21, 2005, when community members and elders from a number of the 10 [Algonquian](#) nations in the [Ottawa](#) area convened on the Kitigan Zibi reservation in [Kanawagi, Quebec](#), to inter ancestral human remains and burial goods — some dating back 6,000 years.

The ceremony marked the end of a journey spanning thousands of years and many miles. The remains and artifacts, including [beads](#), [tools](#) and [weapons](#), were originally excavated from various sites in the [Ottawa Valley](#), including [Morrison](#) and the [Allumette Islands](#). They had been part of the [Canadian Museum of Civilization](#)'s research collection for decades, some since the late 1800s. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology>

Corporate Espionage

Of course it is not just historical artifacts and documents that need to be considered in this discussion. “Modern” documents are just as likely to change hands, and it could be argued in a slightly easier way than trying to walk out of a building with a ceremonial sword concealed on your person. In the days of the Cold War, gathering information on military targets, technology and government actions was considered essential, resorting to many methods including breaking ciphers and codes and of course passing on documents that caused the deaths of many people, especially agents for the “other side”. Today’s wars are fought on many technological fronts using Satellites, Key Hole Telescopes (Where do you think Google Earth comes from) and of course the ease in which electronic documents can be sent to interested parties. As you know if you have an interest in Electronic Document and Records Management there are inherent problems trying to keep track of what is being created and by whom, let alone what happens to these same documents once they are created.

With many thoughts
Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder:

“They copied all they could follow but they couldn’t copy my mind so I left then sweating and stealing a year and a half behind.”

Rudyard Kipling